

Gotta Have Faith: The Impact of Religion in Study Abroad

RELIGION TASK FORCE- DIVERSITY ABROAD & SUNY BUFFALO STATE

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GOAL(S)

To share the perspective of students who participated in GHF study in regard to the importance of religion in their decision, selection and participation in study abroad programs

To gain insight in regard to the role we play as advisers when informing students about opportunities available such as study abroad

OUTLINE

- **Study**

- Introduction
- Method
- Thesis
- Conceptual Framework

- **Literature Review**

- US Study Abroad Profile
- Religion Landscape in US

- **GHF**

- Findings
- Conclusion

A. STUDY- INTRODUCTION

Diversity Abroad – Religion Task Force (2014-2015)

- Evelyn Rosario(SUNY Buffalo State),Chair & Principal Investigator
- Nora Larkin (CAPA), Boston, MA
- Eric Leinen (University of Minnesota), Members and Study Collaborators
- Lilian –Lopez McGee , Consultant, Diversity Abroad

IRB at Buffalo State

- Proposal
- Survey – OPINIO
- Institutional Agreements & IRB

Recruitment

- **8 Institutions participated**

Institutions

- Eight Institutions participated in the study
 - Augsburg College
 - Martin Luther College
 - St. Benedict College
 - St. John's University
 - SUNY Buffalo State
 - University of Minnesota
 - University of Utah
 - University of Wisconsin-Madison
- Five other Institutions were invited to participate of which two declined, one did not participate, and three did not respond to the invitation

Thesis

□ Religion is among the least factors considered or explored in the decision of students and the advisers' conversations during the process of studying abroad.

- Rationale

- Religion is a particularly sensitive topic that can play a role in many students' study abroad experiences.
- Concerns about how students will be able to practice their religion abroad and how they will be perceived can determine where they study, for how long, and housing types overseas.
- For study abroad advisors, the diversity of world religions, and the role it plays for each individual student, can be particularly difficult to navigate.

Conceptual Framework: Challenges

- Encounter **“anti-American sentiment”**
- Difference in **expectations**
 - of “age, gender and sexual double standards”
- Cultural, beliefs, and values **differences**
- “Around the world freedom of **religion is under threat**” - President Obama -2013

Theories

Three stages are involved in the process of decision making in participating in studying abroad:
‘predisposition, search and selection of a departure for a particular location and program’ (Salisbury 2009, 123)

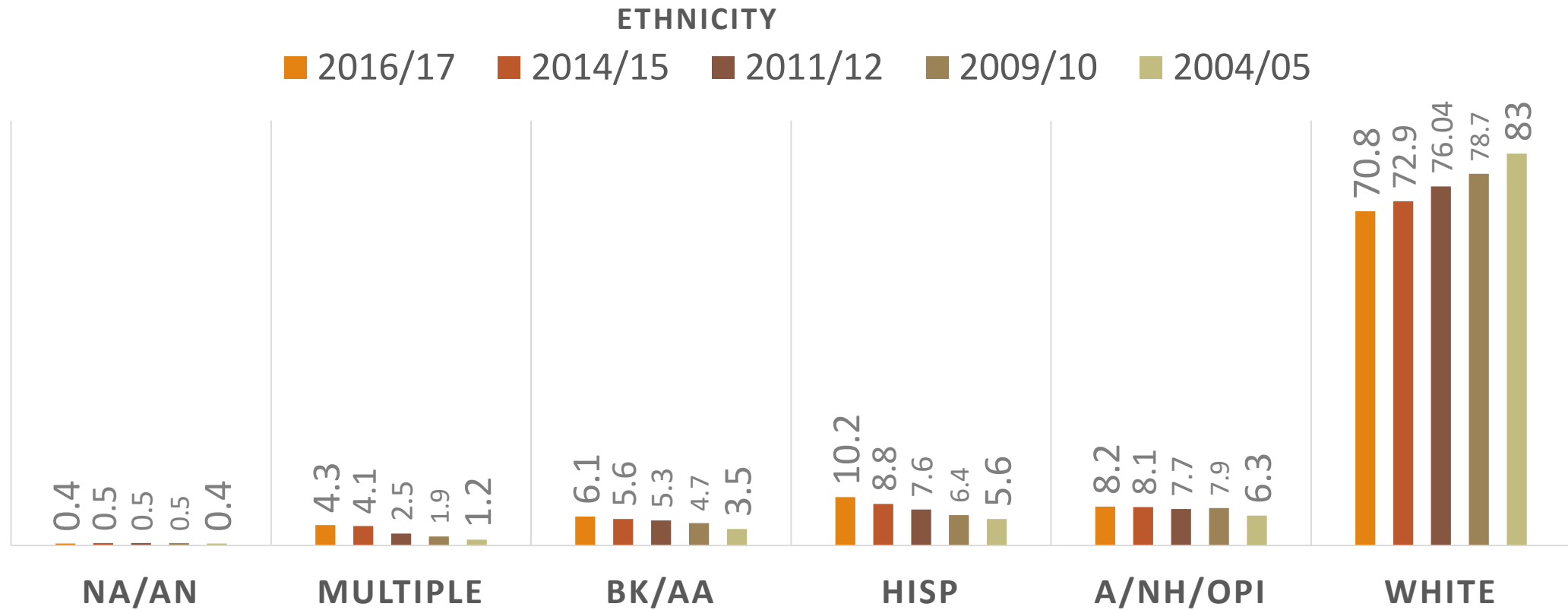
- **“Habitus”** developed by P. Bourdieu (1986)
“The generating and unifying principles of practices...constituted by a whole system of predispositions inculcated by the material circumstances of life and by family upbringing [...] considered inherited in the nature of things” (Bourdieu 1976, 118)
- **“Student –choice construct”** developed by Laura Perna (2006)
“[...] influenced by the nature and amount of human, financial, social and cultural capital available to the student throughout the sequence” (Salisbury et al., 123, 139)
- **“Human Capital Theory”** developed by Smith (18thC), Becker (1964), Schultz (1961) and Mincer (1974); Schultz (1961), Bourdieu 1986, Coleman 1988, Putnam 1995, etc.
‘schooling raises earnings and productivity mainly by providing knowledge, skills and a way of analyzing problems’.

B. Literature Review:

U.S. STUDY ABROAD PROFILE

- **U.S. Student** participating in study abroad is **increasing**
 - 2016/17, **increase 2.3%** (332,727)
- Most of participants go **to Europe (54%)**
- Most are **females**
- Most are **White** students
- **Diversity of students is increasing**
- **Lack of** participation of **underrepresented students** is huge

ETHNICITY in Study Abroad



U.S. Religion Landscape

- **Christianity still remains the dominant religious group in US,**
 - although it has **decreased** from 2007-2014 from 78.4% -70.6% [<8].
 - Catholics, Protestants and Mainland Protestant has dropped as well
- **Unaffiliated and/or None (16.1% – 22. 8% [+6.7%]) have increased**
- **“None” identified has increased from 19 – 56 million respectively**
 - These are identified as atheists, agnostics and “nothing in particular”
- **Non-Christian faiths (4.7% - 5.9% [+1.2%]) have increased**
- **By 2050 ... Muslim is projected to be the second largest religious group in U.S**

Influential Factors

- **Funding**
- **Support: family, faculty, staff, friends, peers**
- **Preparedness/education: family and own**
- **Information gathered: previous to study abroad**
- **Social and economic means (social and capital)**
- **Institutional Support : lack of it**
- **Promotion – lack of representation of own ethnicity in publicity**
- **Language differences**
- **Cultural differences**
- **Fear of “ISMS” – discrimination, prejudices, stigmas**
- **Expectation from own and others**
- **Attitudes, open-mindedness**

C. GHF STUDY FINDINGS

- **Augsburg College**
- **Martin Luther College**
- **St. Benedict College**
- **St. John's University**
- **SUNY Buffalo State**
- **University of Minnesota**
- **University of Utah**
- **University of Wisconsin-Madison**

The Study

503 Participants

- 18+ years of age

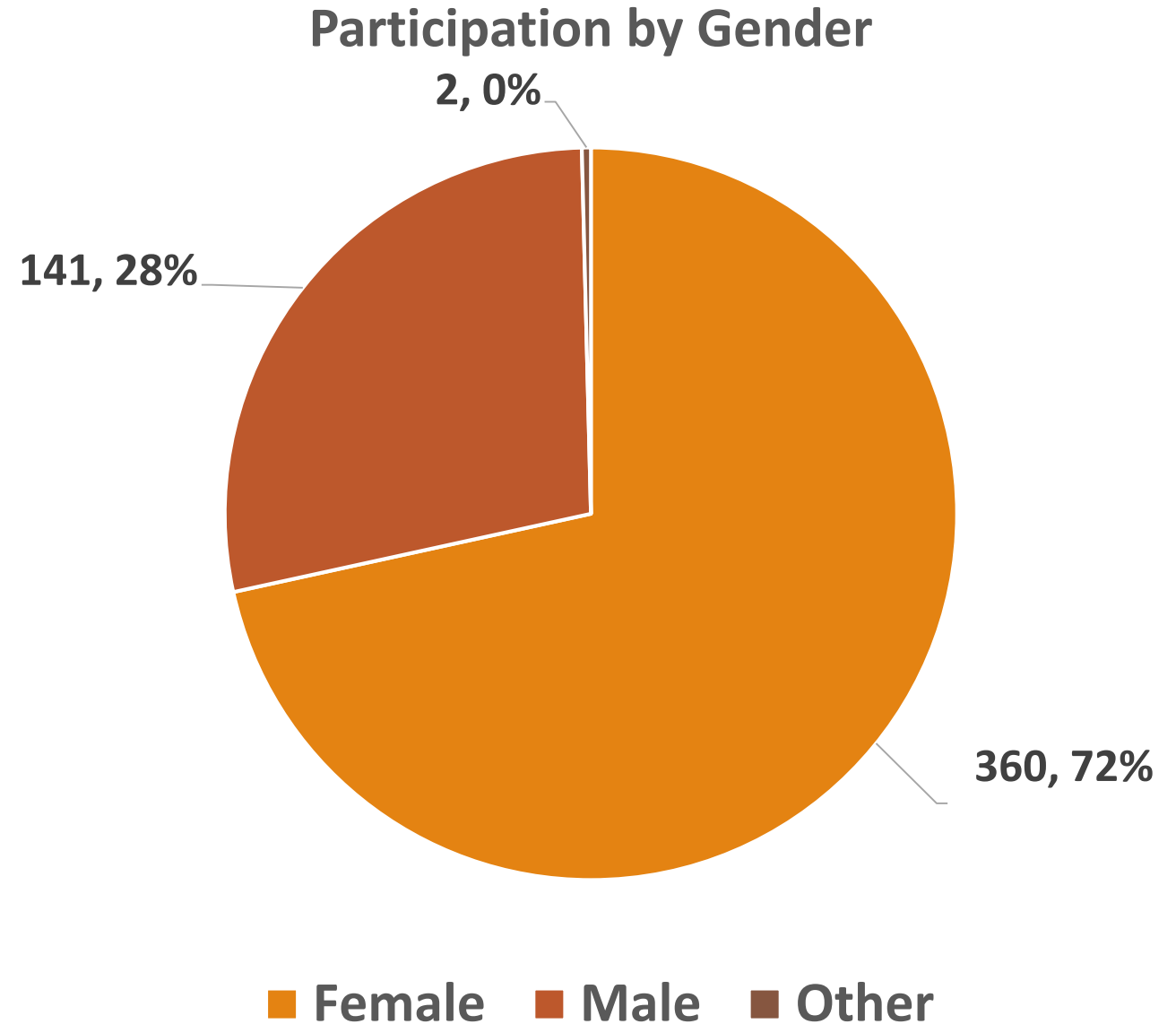
17 Questions

- Multiple Choice
- Open Text

Participation by Gender

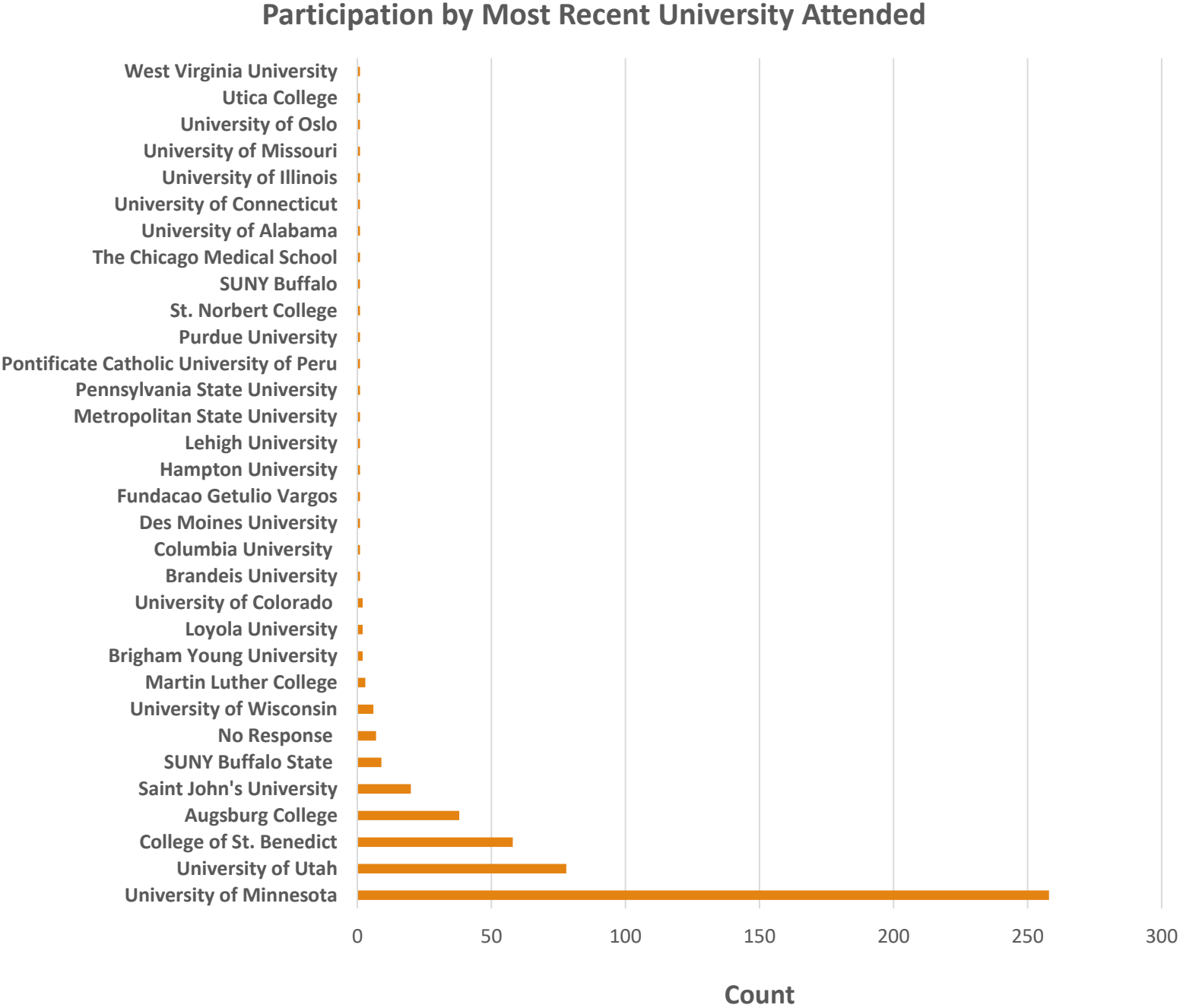
- 72% Female
- 28% Male
- 0.04% Other

Q1,2.



Q3. Most Recent University Attended

· University of Minnesota	51%
· University of Utah	16%
· College of St. Benedict	12%
· Augsburg College	8%
· Saint John's University	4%
· SUNY Buffalo State	2%
· University of Wisconsin	1%
· Martin Luther College	1%
· <i>No Response</i>	1%



Q4.
66
Study Abroad
Countries
Represented

Most Frequently Visited

United Kingdom	10%
Italy	8%
France	6%
Spain	6%
India	4%
China	4%
Germany	4%
Ireland	3%
Turkey	3%
Greece	3%
Denmark	3%
Mexico	2%
Norway	2%
Japan	2%
Puerto Rico	2%
South Africa	2%
Thailand	2%
Kenya	2%

66 Countries

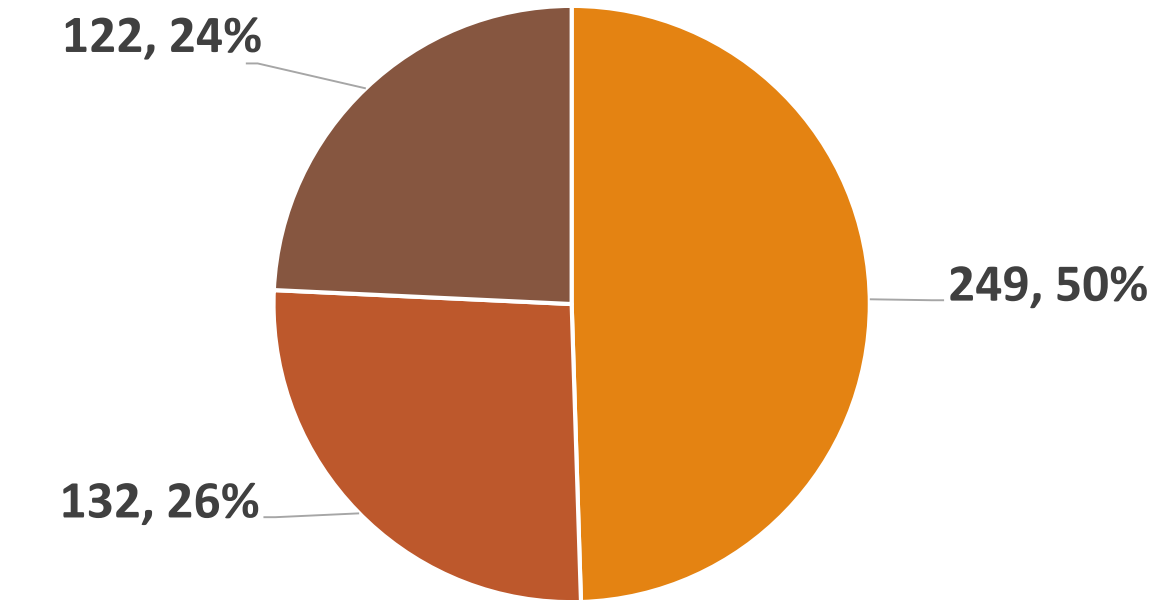
Antigua	Greece	Poland
Argentina	Guatemala	Puerto Rico
Armenia	Hungary	Qatar
Australia	Iceland	Russia
Austria	India	Rwanda
Belgium	Indonesia	Senegal
Belize	Ireland	South Africa
Brazil	Israel	South Korea
Chile	Italy	Spain
China	Japan	Sweden
Colombia	Kenya	Switzerland
Costa Rica	Korea	Taiwan
Cuba	Malta	Tanzania
Czech Republic	Mexico	Thailand
Denmark	Morocco	Turkey
Dominican Republic	Namibia	Uganda
Ecuador	Nepal	United Arab Emirates
El Salvador	Netherlands	United Kingdom
Fiji	New Zealand	Uruguay
France	Nicaragua	Venezuela
Germany	Norway	Vietnam
Ghana	Palestine	

Q5.

Study Abroad Length

- 50% mid-term
- 50% short term

Length of Study Abroad



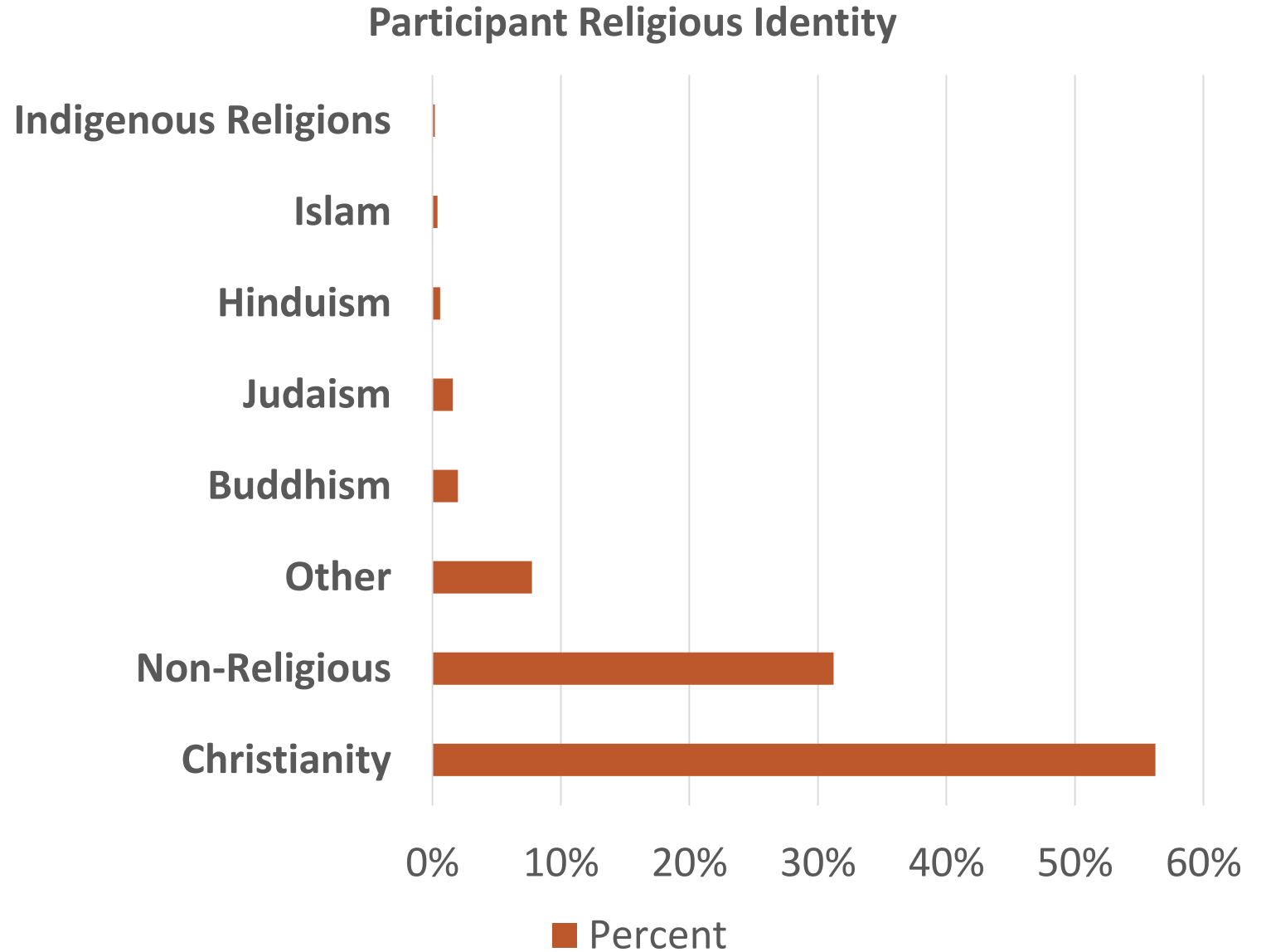
- 1 semester or longer
- 3 weeks or shorter
- Longer than 3 weeks, but shorter than 1 semester

Q6. Participant Religious Identity

Most participants identify as:

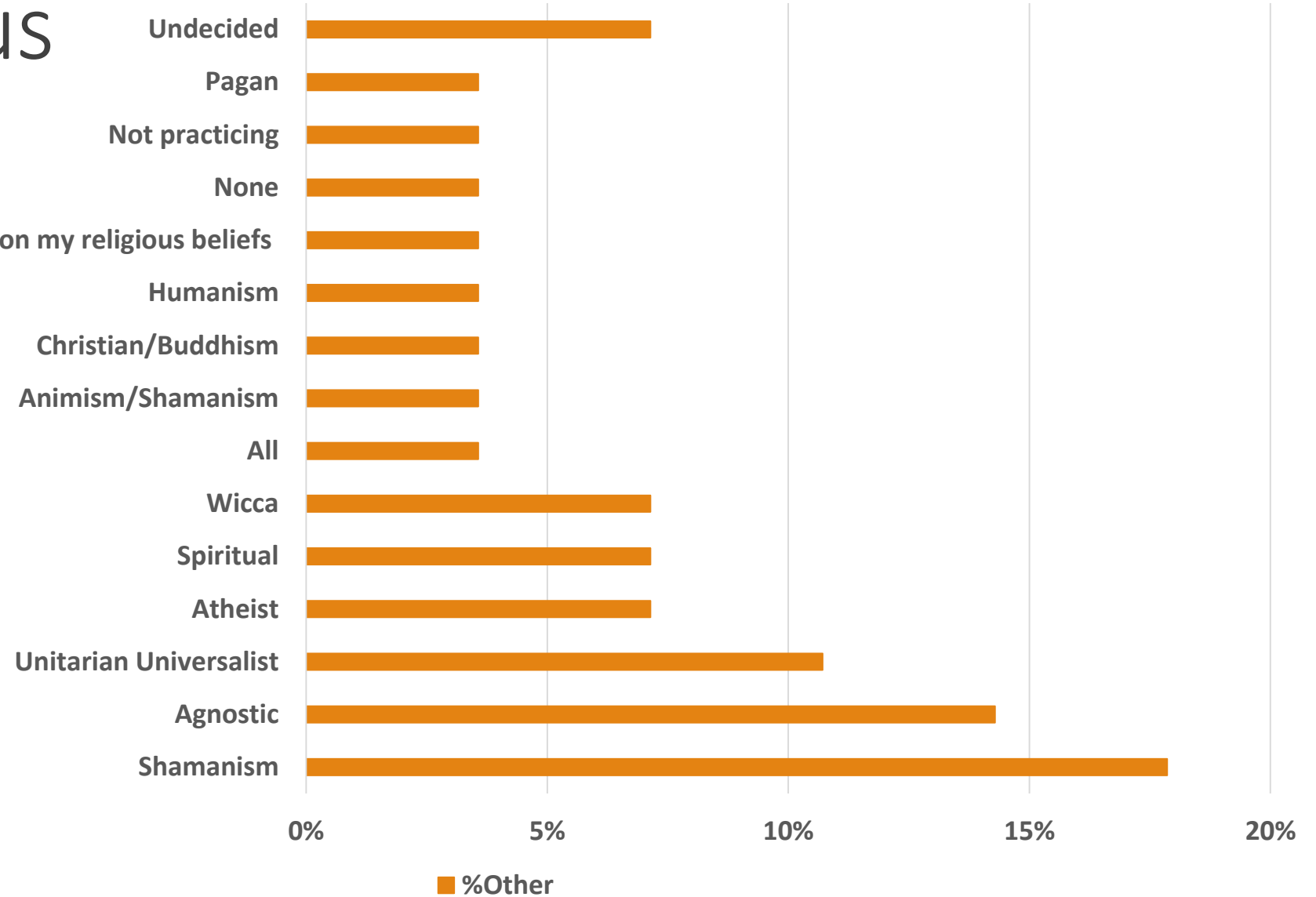
Christian or
Non-Religious

- 56% Christian
- 31% Non-Religious
- 8% Other

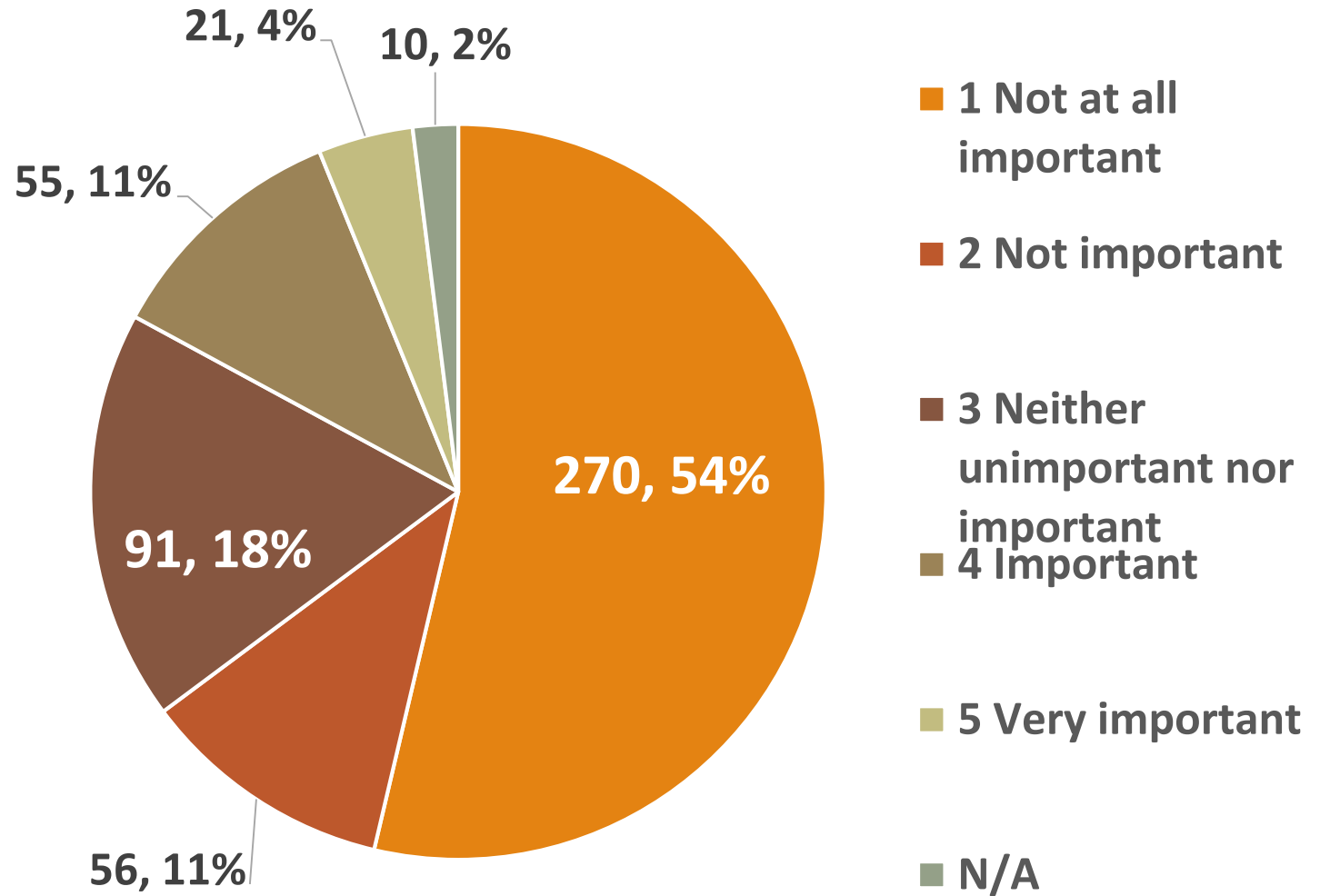


Other Religious Identities

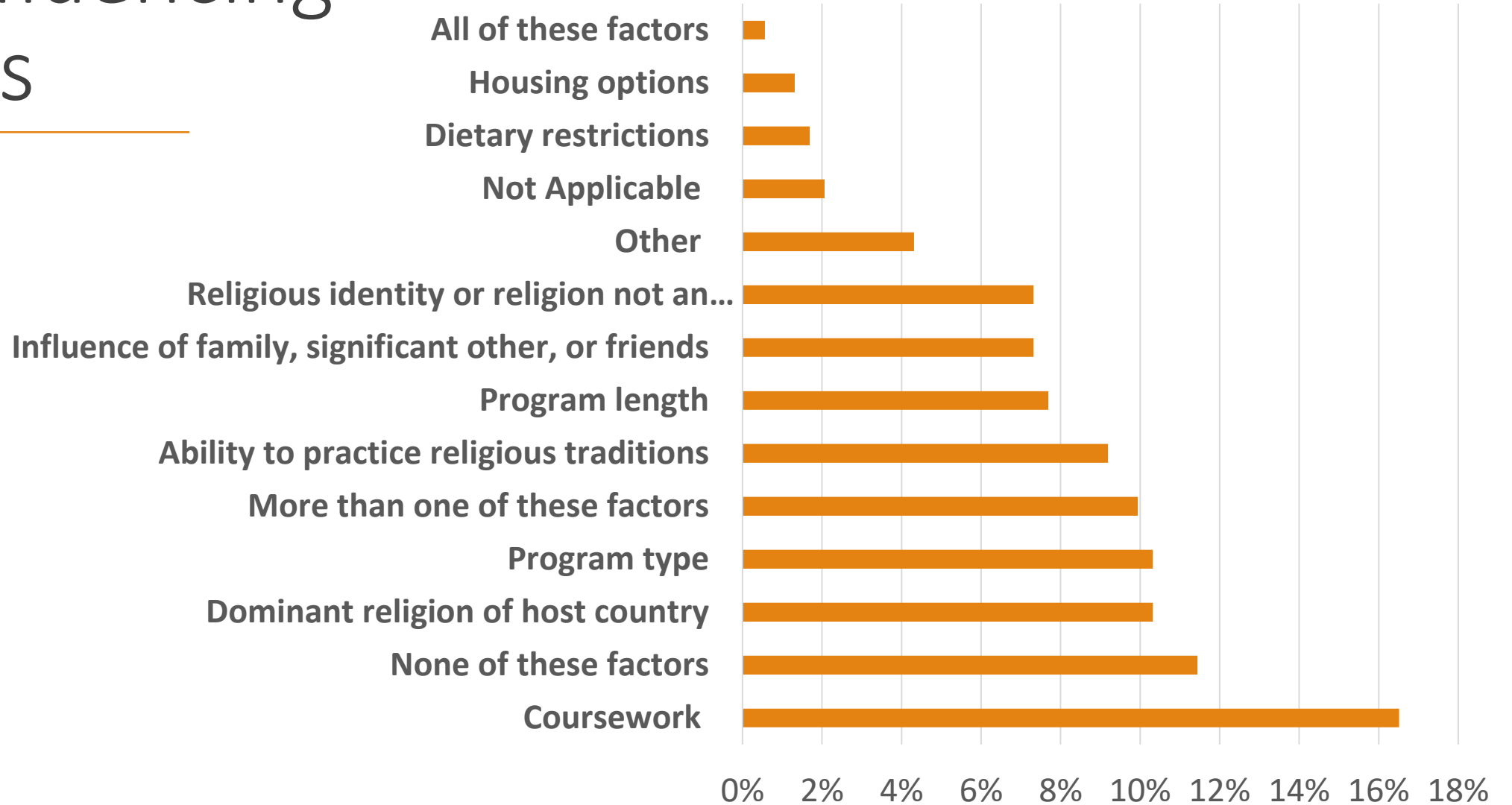
I choose not to put a label on my religious beliefs



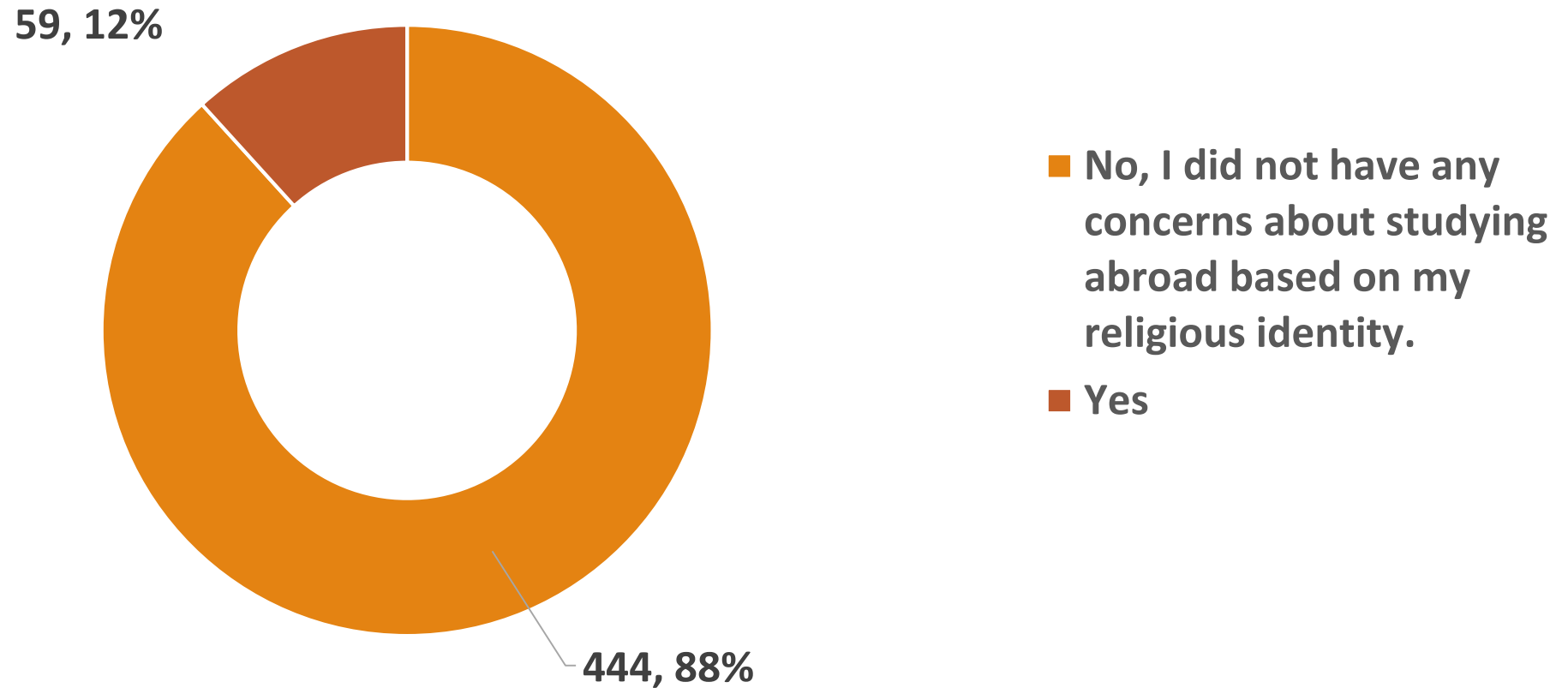
Q7. Religion as a determining factor



Q8. Influencing Factors

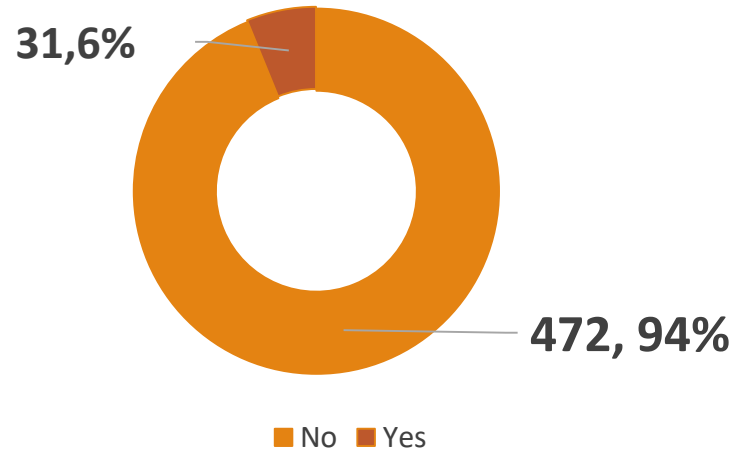


Q9. Pre-Study Abroad Concerns

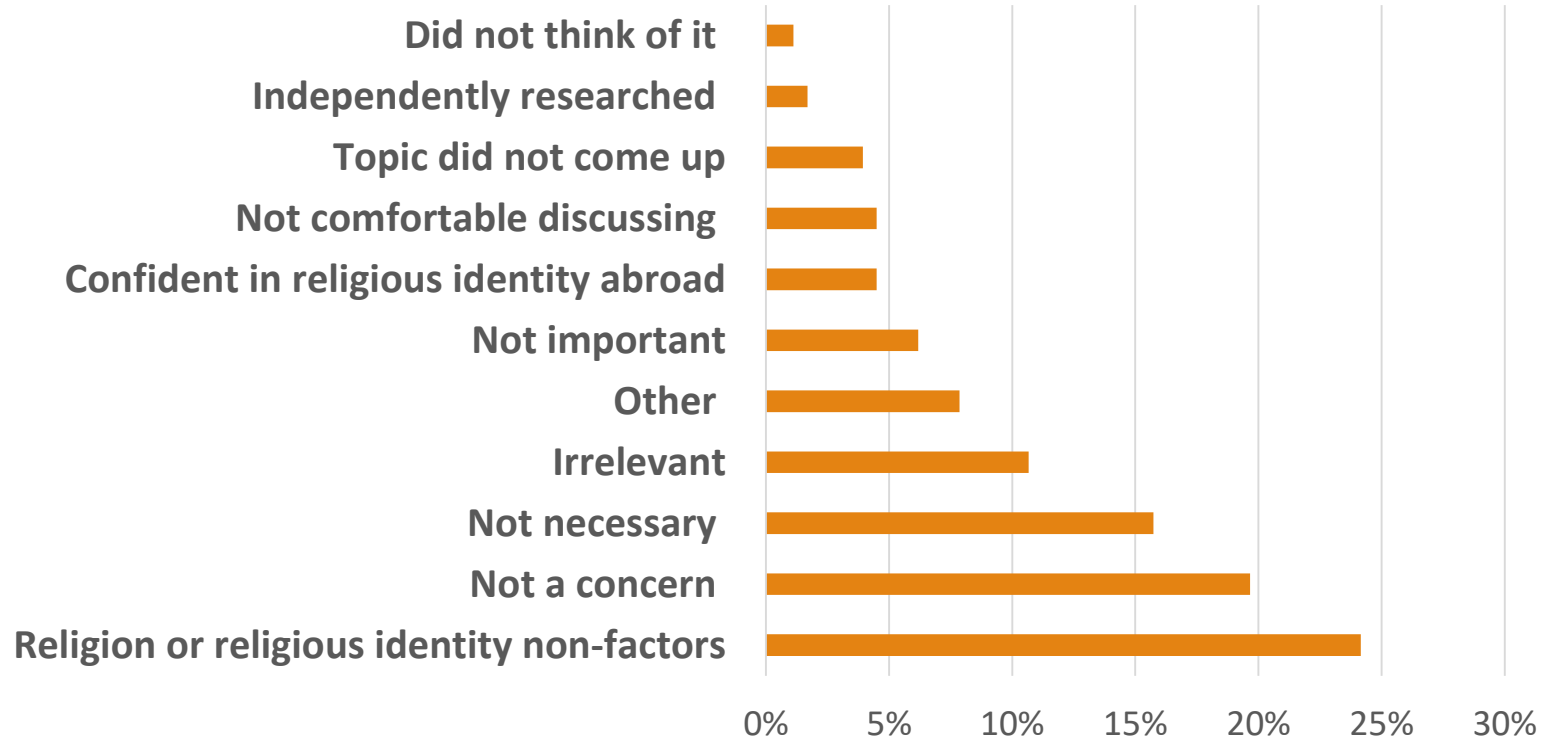


Q10,11. Pre-departure discussion of religious identity with advisor?

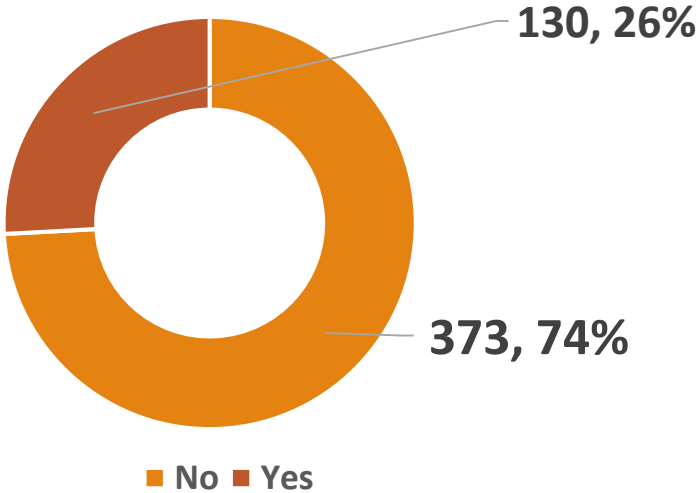
- **94% did not discuss religious identity with advisor**
- Religious identity was a non-factor, not a concern, deemed unnecessary, or irrelevant in 70% of these instances



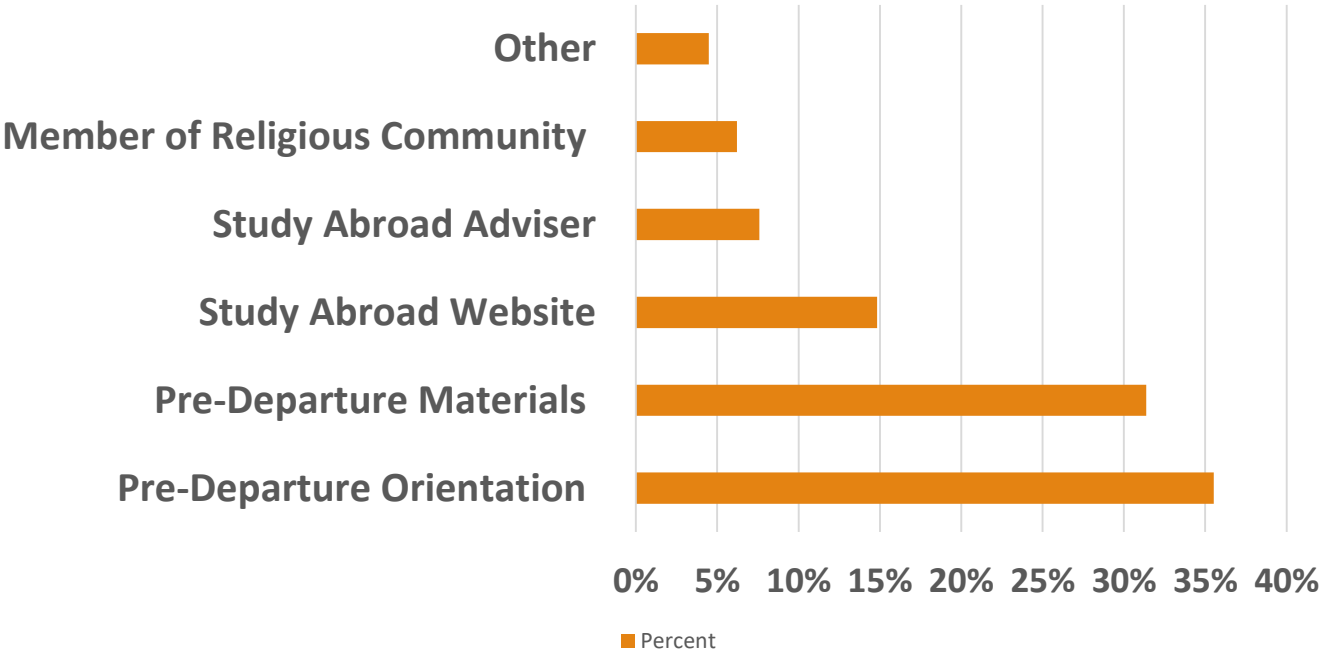
Why Not?



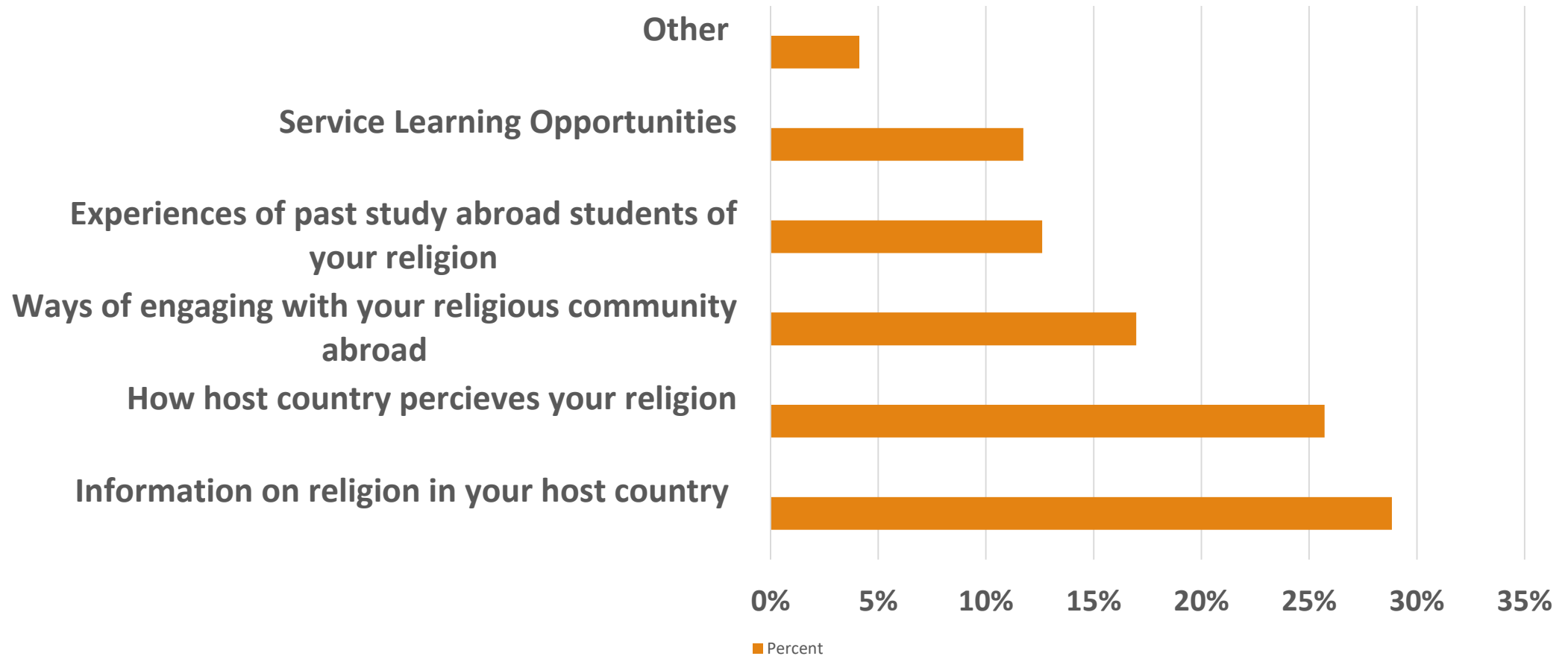
Q12.
Received religious
identity
information pre-
departure?



How was information
received?



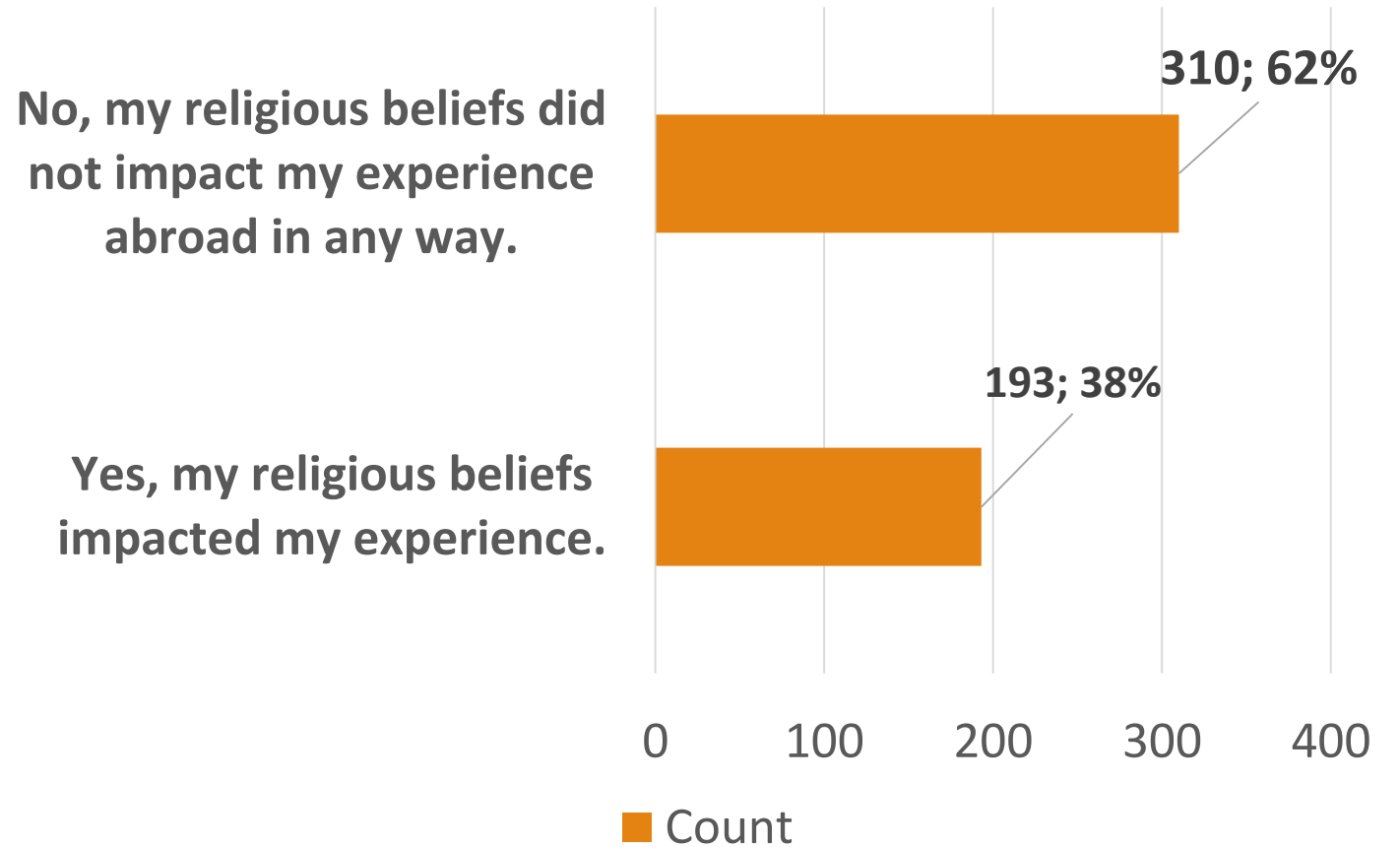
Q.13 Pre-departure topics related to religion useful to know



“Other” pre-departure topics related to religion useful to know Open Text:

- “**Addresses of worship for my religion**”
- “**How** students of the **LGBTQ** community **are treated in the country**”
- “**How** to **respectfully ask faith related questions** in your host country”
- “I would like to know **how atheists can escape** the onslaught of **religious ideology**”
- “Any **expectations of me at religious sites** (beyond dress code and basic respectful behavior)”
- “Obviously Turkey is predominantly Muslim. I wish I would have done **background research** to **better prepare myself on how they live.**”
- “**Impact of witnessing extreme poverty on one's faith and dealing with** important ethical/philosophical questions that arise from being exposed to such circumstances.”

Q14.
Impact of own
religious beliefs
on
study abroad
experience?



Impact of religious beliefs on study abroad experience? Open Text

- “..my religious beliefs gave me a **deeper connection** to the local culture and enabled me to make new friends in the country - which has been tremendously helpful in getting me to continue practicing the language!”
- “As with everything, **my beliefs colored what we were studying and what we saw.**”
- “**Avoided activities** that went against my beliefs (e.g., **drinking alcohol**).”
- “Because **religion** is so central to life in the city I was in, it was **impossible to avoid the subject.**”
- “Being somewhere away from home, it was nice to find a church where I could be **a part of a community.**”
- “**Gave me stuff to think about.**”
- “**I connected** with a lot of other students who were also non-religious but interested in discussing religion.”

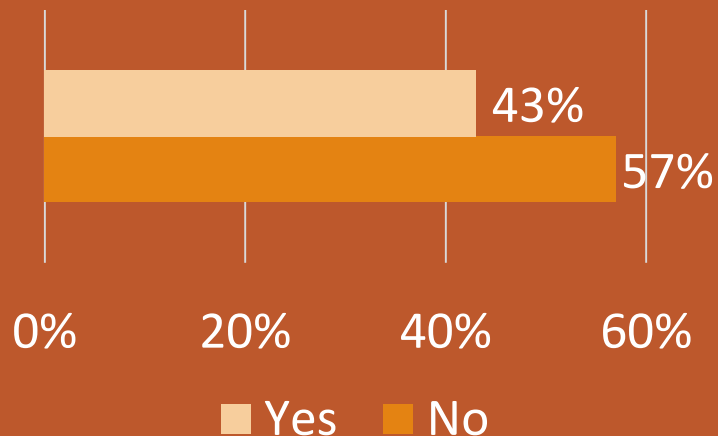
Impact of religious beliefs on study abroad experience? Open Text *Cont.*

- “If anything, **my spiritual beliefs were strengthened** while abroad but my specific religious traditional beliefs were weakened.”
- “**I became** surprisingly **more Religious**; not that I subscribed more to the dogma, but I became more interested in my own Religious identity after seeing theirs.”
- “**I compared my beliefs in a constructive and positive way** to the mainly Buddhist way of life and how the differences impacted our lifestyles and cultures.”
- ““During my three week stay we spent over 4 days focusing on the Jewish culture of Prague as well as the impact of the Nazis in the Czech Republic. These experiences completely **changed how I viewed my religion and how I think about it now**. I was emotionally so connected, as I say with a lot of consideration, a lot more than the other students that weren't connected to the religion and the religious persecution that we were studying.”
- “**I felt incredibly uncomfortable discussing any aspect of my beliefs.**”

Impact of religious beliefs on study abroad experience? Open Text *Cont.*

- “Though I identify as ELCA Lutheran, **I am very open to other faiths.** I found many ways to incorporate aspects of Buddhism and Hinduism into my own understanding of God and theology.”
- “I went to India thinking, **Hinduism** would somewhat be similar to my religion - shamanism. But there **were different values and religious practices and rituals done of course very different from my religion.** Although I've come to understand and appreciate Hinduism and my religion too.”
- “**My non-religious beliefs were found to be odd in a dominant religious country.**”
- “Since Tanzania is a very religious country and **I do not identify with any religion** it was very strange at times.”
- “Rwanda is very religious and **I felt a bit pressured by my Catholic host family** to conform to their religious beliefs and practices. I wish I would have known that going in.”
- “My spiritual **beliefs and values guided the way I engaged in activities and interacted** with people.”

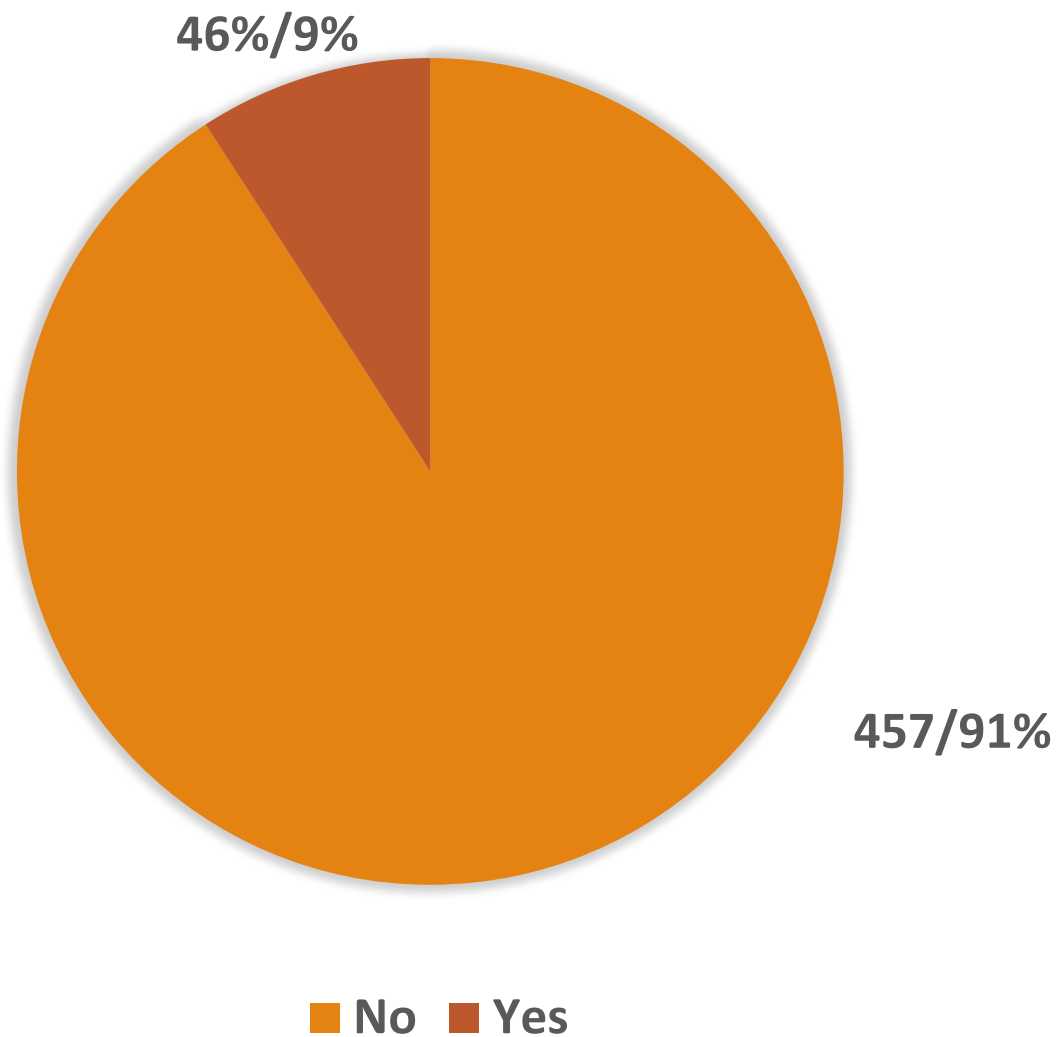
Q15. Did you engage with religious organizations abroad?



Open Text

- “A **LGBTQI** A Christian church in Mexico City and a Christian-Based Communities group”
- “A **Lutheran** church in Vienna's 6th district.”
- “A minor experience talking with a **Jehovah’s Witness** at the Oxford circus station.”
- “Attended a **traditional Spanish Catholic Mass**”
- “Attended prayers at a **Mosque** during Eid”
- “I attended the **Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints** on one Sunday”
- “I **converted to Buddhism** while I studied abroad, actually. My professor often took me to the temple and we prayed a lot”
- “I went to a **Hillsong Denmark church** in Copenhagen.”
- “We **participated** in an **indigenous Mayan ceremony.**”
- “We **participated** in **Shinto festivals** and prayer services and **Buddhist meditation.**”
- “I went to a great **Catholic church** in my neighborhood.”
- “We **participated** in **traditional Balinese Ceremonies.**”

Q16.
Change in
religious
identity?



Q. 17 Advice from Participants - Summary

- *Be open minded [everyone, everything, religion, cultures, traditions]*
- *Ask questions [professors, advisers, mentors]*
- *Research [ahead of time]*
- *Experience [new culture, country, people, language]*
- *Respect [mindful; don't judge]*
- *Learn [other religions, absorb, understand difference in beliefs]*
- *Prepare for religious pressure and expectations*
- *Adapt [embrace other traditions, be compassionate]*
- *Engage [community, worship, visit local churches, willing to participate]*
- *Plan*
- *Don't worry; don't be afraid*
- *Have fun*
- *Go for it!*

Q17. Advice Open Text

- “**Be aware of how common your religion is in your host country** and make sure that if you desire, you are able to legally practice your religion and have access to services.”
- “**Be aware** of the host religion and **what is acceptable and what is not**. You do not want to offend anyone on accident.”
- “**Be open-minded**”
- “**Enjoy it!** And **learn** from the local congregations.”
- “Even if you're not religious, it's an important part of people's lives; if you want to fully **immerse yourself in a new culture, try to learn about how your hosts practice religion.**”
- “**I grew a lot in my faith** while studying abroad. It is a great opportunity to be stretched and grow.”
- “**Be Respectful**”

Advice Open Text *Cont.*

- “**Share your** religion. America is often perceived as entirely Christian.”
- “If you are a **LGBTQ** student make sure that you are going to be safe and respected where you are going. For all students though of any religion, attempt **to keep an open mind and think about why religious practices are being enacted in the ways they are rather than simply getting upset**. There is a logic, even if it isn't one that you don't agree with, and as students who are there to learn about new cultures we need to learn to respect their right to decide how to practice even if it is not how we choose to.”
- “**Be you**”
- “Your an **Atheist**, you don't have any religious structure or organization, and most people won't mind. Europe is very secular and seems to care less whether religion is important or means nothing to you, just **be tolerant and be open minded** with religious people and most will treat you with due respect.”
- “**Stand firm in your beliefs**. Don't be swayed.”

Conclusion(s) & Recommendation(s)

Gotta Have Faith Study: The Impact of Religion in Study Abroad found that:

- Religion does not play an important role in the planning and decision making of students studying abroad**
- Nor does it impact their religious identity during the experience overall**
- Participants' religious backgrounds, ideologies and experiences are diverse**
- Pre departure discussion about religion with advisors are uncommon but student would not mind to have it previous to study abroad**
- There is a need to have more long term studies performed in the area of influential factors that may determine a student's participation in study abroad**
- Focus on the lack of underrepresented students to attract and increase their participation in study abroad programs**

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